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THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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In an editorial on the "Six-Six Plan" in *School and Home Education*¹ of September, 1914, Professor Bagley has raised in a very pointed way the question whether the cutting-off of the last two years of the elementary school is not going to interfere with the most important function of the elementary school, which function he describes in the following terms: The function of the elementary school is that of "insuring among our people not only a common basis of certain intellectual skills such as the number arts and the language arts, but also, and more significantly, a common basis of certain ideas and ideals and standards which go a long way toward insuring 'social solidarity,' . . . *a basis of common feeling and common thought and common aspiration which is absolutely essential to an effective democracy.*"

Professor Bagley thinks that there is danger that a course of school training which begins to differentiate after the sixth grade endangers the democratic purpose of the common school.

In the October issue of the same journal he returns to the topic while discussing the Springfield survey. He takes Mr. Ayers to task for the way in which the survey has supported its advocacy of the six-six plan. The following quotation covers the questions which are of interest to us at this time:

The Springfield survey, for example, in recommending the "six-six" plan (or the "six-three-three" plan), advances only three very trivial arguments against it, saying nothing of the evils that may possibly be involved in shortening by two full years the period of "common" education, and making no provision, so far as we can see, for counteracting the inevitable tendencies toward differentiation in the seventh and eighth years.

These omissions, however, are of slight significance in comparison with the misleading character of one of the statements adduced in support of the plan. We read: "The present administrative division of schools into eight elementary

¹ Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, pp. 3-5.

and four high-school grades is illogical and is based on the accidents of history. We are the only great modern nation that has such a division. England, Germany, France, and Japan have developed systems better adapted to the psychological nature and needs of the child" (p. 118).

A statement of this sort is thoroughly misleading. What does it mean? On the surface one would infer that the countries in question have adopted the six-six plan, or something akin to it—which is not true. The real difference between our school system and that of Germany, for example, lies in the fact that our system constitutes an "educational ladder" open to all upon the same conditions, while Germany's system is differentiated from the outset—*not on the basis of "psychological needs," but on the basis of social castes*. The fundamental difficulty in readjusting our educational system lies precisely at this point: Shall the United States go the way of European nations and recognize in its public schools the existence of social and economic strata, or shall it continue a type of school organization that is admirably adapted to perpetuate the ideals of democracy and equal opportunity? This is the question that ought to be put fairly and squarely before the people in the reports of school surveys.

No one can read this vigorous challenge of the six-six plan without realizing that if the plan is to gain a wider adoption it must prove itself to be more democratic than the present plan, it must prove itself to be supported by the maturer experience of older civilizations, it must prove itself to be in accord with "psychological needs," and finally it must incidentally provide an answer for each and all of Professor Bagley's questions and criticisms.

Let us begin with Europe, since that is the easiest matter to set at rights. It is true, as Professor Bagley points out, that each of the European systems is a twofold system. The *Volkschule* of Germany educates its pupils for eight years and then turns them into the laboring and common soldier class. The secondary schools alone provide the student with the expectation of going on to a higher education. It should be noted, however, that for every student who has the expectation of a complete education the system is very much like that proposed in the six-three-three plan. If a boy is going to have a complete education, his training is not divided into an eight-year period and a four-year period, but his training is divided into a three-year primary, a six-year period which leads to military privilege, and a three-year period for completing his secondary course. And the six-year period above men-

tioned is so subdivided in the content of its courses as to make it perfectly clear that the age of twelve years is recognized as a most important turning-point in his training. For the child who is to have a complete training in the German system the division of work is like that proposed in the six-and-six plan in that the age of twelve is recognized as a point of readjustment. We can agree with Professor Bagley's repudiation of the dual, undemocratic system of Germany, but when we have done so let us not accept the eight-year school as our model, for that is what Germany provides for those who are to have only limited opportunities.

The case is no less clear in England and France. Let us take England, which provides a somewhat simpler demonstration. In England one finds that there is a method of transition through examinations from the common school to the secondary school. The secondary school of England, like that of Germany, accepts boys from the better classes at the kindergarten age. The secondary school, in contrast with our American secondary school, has primary grades. Also, as indicated above, this school receives in the upper classes after examination the products of the common schools. These transfers are usually made before the age of fourteen. Indeed the effort is everywhere made to push the transfer age back to at least twelve. The writer had the experience repeatedly in visiting English secondary schools of hearing the headmasters complain that the late transfers from the common schools were most disadvantageous. The boys who grow up in the secondary schools begin their languages and their science and their mathematics at twelve. The boys who come in late from the common schools are at a great disadvantage. The headmasters clamor for an early transfer, if the transfer is to be made at all. They want their students not later than twelve years of age.

It is hard to understand how Professor Bagley can be so offended by the citation of the example of Europe in favor of the six-and-six plan. Indeed, if he will go to Scotland, where they have long prided themselves on their skill as schoolmasters, he will find a six-and-three plan and a six-and-six plan working out in detail some of the problems which his editorial suggests. It is strictly true that Europe is the best possible source of examples of a successful

six-and-six plan. At the same time it is strictly true, as Professor Bagley points out, that the six-and-six plan as administered in Germany is not the plan of the common school. This last statement furnishes us with the text with which to open up the matter of democracy in our schools.

The eight-and-four plan of American schools was not the product of a struggle for democracy. Everyone who belongs to the generation of present-day adults knows that in 1880 the high school was not a democratic institution. If one goes back to 1870 or 1860, the case is even clearer. The American high school was at its inception the home of the professional class. The very fact that Professor Bagley and most of the rest of us use the phrase "common school" as synonymous with "elementary school" shows that the high school still retains something of its traditions of exclusiveness. Since 1880, however, one of the most impressive educational changes that has ever gone on in any land has been going on in the high schools of the United States. The student body has doubled twice. Schools of this grade are built with a lavish equipment that bears eloquent testimony to the fact that communities are prepared to give children the best there is, even if they have to bond the future so that the children will have to pay for what they get. States have vied with each other in paying traveling expenses of boys and girls in rural sections, so that it may be truthfully said that to the great majority of American children is offered the opportunity of a secondary school education.

These facts may all be summed up in a single statement: The high school has come to be a part of the common-school system. With this change come the opportunity and the duty of setting aside every artificial barrier to the best organization of the complete course of study. The eight-and-four system is an inheritance of the days when the common school and the high school were separate in organization and purpose. The eight-and-four plan is a painful reminder of the fact that the common school of America was modeled on the limited, undemocratic people's school of Europe. Now we may face our new problem of a single complete school system without restraint of any type. Let us divide only where changing development in the child's mind calls for change in

method. Let us take advantage of continuity of purpose and aim in the only land where continuity is the hope and the right of all classes.

We do not need to go to Europe, however, for our evidence that the eight-and-four plan is not a fixed and finally approved plan. New England, representing as it does our oldest and on the whole most favored section, tried an experiment of organizing nine years of elementary or common schools. This experiment preceded the present period of high-school training and represents one method of extending in a democratic way the school opportunity of the common people. That experiment failed because it offered too meager an enlargement of the school opportunity. Though one finds throughout New England today many ninth grades, they are recognized as appendenda inherited from an experimental past. Who would think of advocating a ninth grade today as the solution of our American problem of democracy?

On the other hand, we have seven-year common schools in abundance. In a careful study reported in the *Elementary School Teacher* in 1913,¹ Mr. E. C. Brooks, professor of education at Trinity College, Durham, North Carolina, justifies the following statement:

The information obtained shows that the seven-year grammar school is found in nearly every state in the union; but as a rule it prevails more generally in the South. In New England the nine- and eight-year schools are found in about equal ratio in the larger cities, but the tendency is to reduce all to eight years; while in the West the eight-year school prevails with a tendency to reduce it to seven.

Professor Brooks then compares the programs and modes of promotion common in these different schools with the view to answering the question which he is continually raising, namely: "Can a four-year high-school course resting on a seven-year grammar school give a preparation equal to that of a four-year high-school course resting on an eight-year grammar school?"

The conclusion which he reaches in this matter is not very definite. Two quotations from the later pages of his article will make this clear.

¹ Vol. XIV, No. 1, pp. 20-28; No. 2, pp. 82-92.

All the evils and defects of all of the schools can be found in either class—those of a seven-, eight-, or a nine-year grammar school. . . . Therefore, I am leaving the question where I asked it. The answer is an individual one, not general. It may be wrong, it may be right, and there are instances enough to prove either. Let me say here that we find in every section of the country schools that seem to be working away and trying to understand the reason for the large or the small number of subjects; and the tendency seems to be toward the smaller number.

In the light of these facts how can anyone find any inalienable bond of connection between democracy and the eight-four plan?

If now one turns to the eight-four plan itself, he finds evidence enough that it is weak educationally at many points.

First, let it be noted that in most progressive schools the seventh and eighth grades are organized on the departmental plan with the clearest possible recognition in this fact that the children in these grades require a type of treatment which is wholly different from that given in the lower grades. Children in those upper grades are able to assume responsibility. Their interests begin to be differentiated; their personalities become pronounced; thought and behavior become independent.

Second, where school systems have not been wise enough to put new and advanced work into the upper grades, these grades become the homes of the most vapid, wearisome, and futile reviewing. Arithmetic has been incumbered with clumsy and useless formulas in the effort to stretch it to the point where high-school algebra begins. Can anyone find a valid reason why algebraic methods should not be put at the service of "common-"school children? Can anyone tell us why studies of space should be classified as the property of the higher schools? If the lines of demarcation which are now drawn have justification other than tradition, certainly the defender of present practices ought to be concrete and explicit in defending the present course of study.

From the point of view of the high school the demand for readjustment is no less urgent. One of the cardinal principles which has always governed the high-school course of study is the principle that the student must be introduced to all the broad fundamental types of human knowledge. The student must be introduced to natural science, to the study of social life as this is set forth

in history and civics, to other civilizations and their languages and literature, to mathematics in the form of algebra and geometry, to the vernacular both in its literature and in the rhetorical principles that govern its effective use, and, last but not least, to applied knowledge in commercial subjects, and in the practical arts of industry and domestic organization. With this elaborate program before it the high school has been seeking by every possible device to find the time to do its work. It has gradually pushed up the quantity of its requirements until now a bewildering mass of materials is being offered to young people every year and yet the range of high-school offerings is constantly increasing. How shall this congestion be cured? There is but one answer: Give the high school more time in which to do its work. Some of this additional time must ultimately come from a more intimate correlation of high-school work with college work, but some of it must certainly come from a reorganization of the relation of the elementary school to the high school.

If readjustment is thus demanded both by elementary programs and by high-school programs, it is sufficiently justified. But there is another argument in which the interests of both elementary schools and high schools are represented. At present there is endless duplication. English is the worst sinner in this respect. Two years ago the writer heard a committee solemnly report to the National Council of Teachers of English that the problem of correlating elementary English with high-school English is a new and unsolved problem. Unsolved it is, and unsolved it will continue to be so long as seventh- and eighth-grade teachers find their pupils able to do work of the same type as high-school students while the teachers who give this work are not invited into high-school conferences. So long as the upper grades and the high school are apart, Julius Caesar, Miles Standish, and the Ancient Mariner will be used by both sets of pedagogues, and children will wonder why teachers do not find out about each other's work.

History is not quite so bad as English, but it is bad enough in its duplications and conflicts. Of late, nature-study in the grades has sometimes tried to do general introductory work; sometimes the high school has repeated all this work. Science is in a chaotic

condition, in part because the high school and the upper grades belong together but have never succeeded in getting together.

There is one and only one solution of this problem—that is, a reorganization of the schools in the spirit of a more complete recognition of the fact that the seventh and eighth grades are a part of the adolescent school.

The study of children not only warns us of the necessity of preparing for the adolescent changes, but a fuller study of the period just preceding twelve years of age teaches us that this age closes a natural division of school life. It is hardly appropriate in a brief paper like the present to attempt a detailed analysis of the child's mental and social development. It is, however, appropriate to our general theme to point out that during the first three years of school life children are utterly dependent on the examples of society. This is the period of absorbing interest in people and their doings. This is the period of docile imitation. This is the period of initiation into the social arts. At nine years of age or thereabouts comes an entirely new attitude. The child now breaks away from society and enters upon a period of interest in things. During this period the child cultivates a new realization of his own personality. The boy is likely to be rebellious against the restraints of school. This attitude of recoil from the docility exhibited in the primary school is essentially a preparation for the later return to social interests which is characteristic of adolescence. The intermediate period of interest in things and of rebellion against society is a natural antecedent to the adolescent period. When our educational studies are completed we shall not only recognize the striking characteristics of adolescence; we shall also realize that the whole school life must be controlled in its organization by the periodicity of the child's development.

To discuss in a broad, general way the needs of democratic society does not help us very much in organizing the details of the course of study. There is a possibility of organizing the high school so that it shall be democratic; there is a possibility of organizing the elementary school in such a way that it shall serve very little the ends of democracy. Professor Bagley, who furnished us our text for this discussion, can rest assured that we all agree with his

demand for democracy. We cannot share his fear of the high school. His case will not be complete until he shows that the high school is inherently undemocratic. That thesis is likely to prove difficult to defend—more difficult even than his assertion that Europe furnishes no examples of the six-and-six plan.

It is not well, however, to leave the discussion at a point where it seems to be a discussion of remote possibilities. The six-six plan is here for better or for worse. It has come as a result of a natural evolution. It is adopted by many schools which find the eight-four plan unworkable. The advocates of reorganization have a much more optimistic problem than that of beating off skeptics. Our real problem is to make good on the new plan. There is one real danger that threatens the plan. Too often the school system which adopts the new plan does not make a sufficiently radical reorganization. The first years of the junior high school perpetuate the unprogressive, uneconomical traditions of the seventh and eighth grades. Where the six-six plan means nothing but the transfer of two grades from one jurisdiction to the other, it is not worth adopting. The six-six plan, if it is to justify itself, must effect some real economies. There must be broader opportunities offered to students. There must be elimination of duplications. All that is summed up in the statement that students must be carried farther along in their social and intellectual lives under the six-six plan than under the eight-four plan. Critics of the six-six plan will then be adequately answered. What is needed is not opposition to the new plan, but a clear description of the indispensable virtues of the present grades. The task of those who are disposed to be critics comes to be, therefore, the task of praising as loudly as they can in explicit detail that which they admire most in the present elementary school. When they can speak with sufficient eloquence to persuade the world, they will have done the six-six plan the highest service, for they will have taught the six-six plan what to retain. On the other hand, the six-six plan is free to go on its way adjusting its relations to the schools above and below and adjusting its internal relations with a freedom that is new and altogether wholesome, for this new freedom grows out of a social situation that is evidently to be permanent and out of a scientific study which promises to become widespread.